

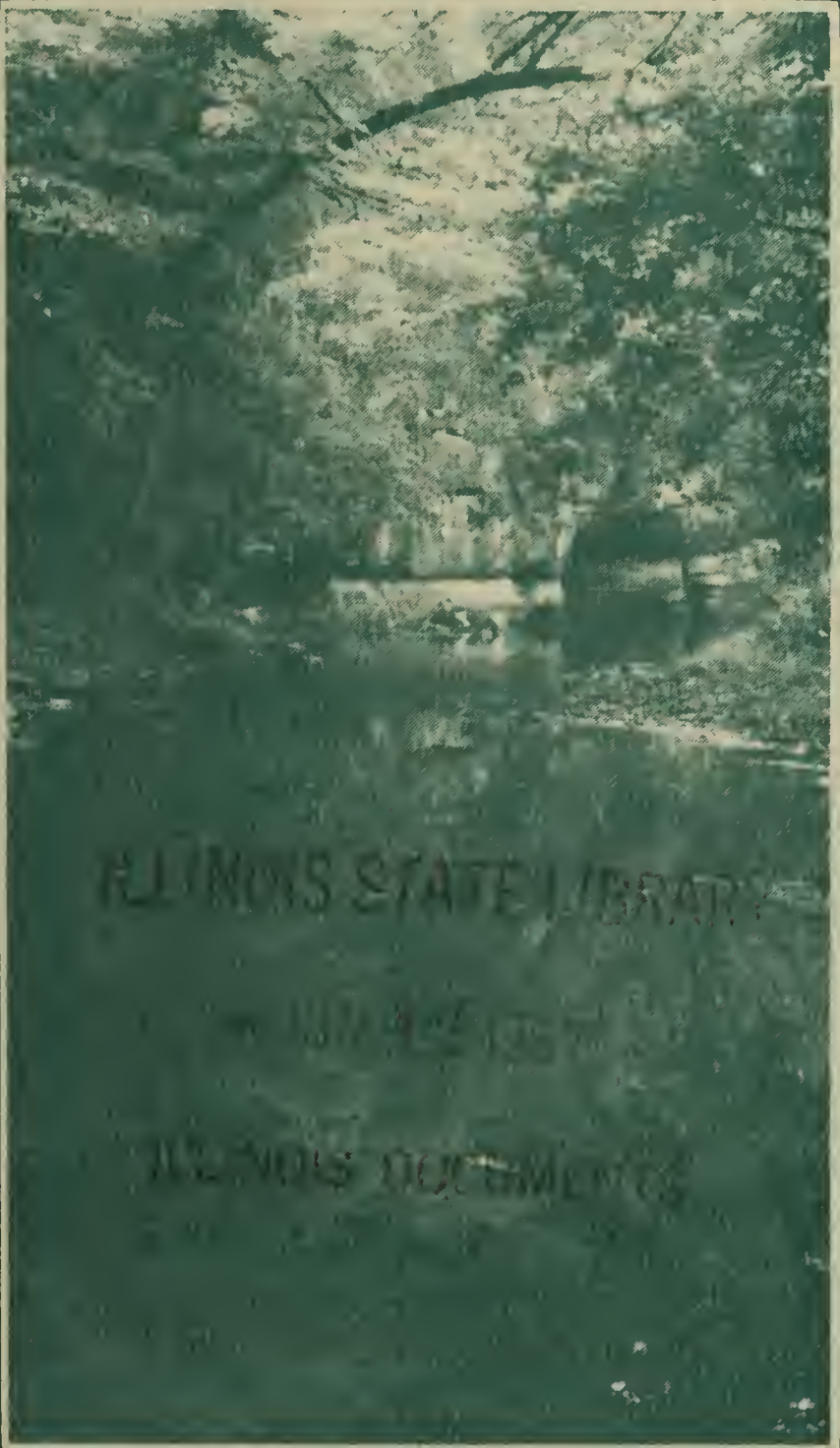
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ILLINOIS

Franklin Creek

NATURAL AREA



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CONSERVATION

THE PARK

Franklin Creek Natural Area is located in Lee County, one mile northwest of the village of Franklin Grove and eight miles east of Dixon just north of Illinois Route 38. The beautiful Franklin Creek flows throughout the 515-acre park. Several large natural springs, hardwood forests, bedrock outcroppings, and a large variety of flora and fauna comprise a pristine ecosystem.

HISTORY

Pioneer families in the 1830s found the Franklin Creek area to be an inviting new home on the sometimes unfriendly prairie. Large, cool springs provided ample amounts of pure drinking water and early refrigeration, hardwood forests provided construction materials, and the creek provided fish for food and water power to run saw and grist mills. The deep, pleasant valleys protected by limestone and sandstone bluffs made ideal homesites shielded from cold winter winds. The mill spring, the largest in the park, provided water power for the largest grist mill in Lee County, constructed in 1847. Still today, many ponds and rock outcroppings along Franklin Creek carry names given to them by pioneer families.

NATURAL SCENE

The park contains a 180-acre nature preserve which is an outstanding and diverse natural area in a uniquely beautiful setting. High, rocky bluffs shelter a perennial creek and create an environment in which a rich flora and fauna thrive. The preserve represents the initial acquisition by the Department of Conservation in the area and, therefore, has been the cornerstone upon which Franklin Creek Natural Area is built. With its dedication as a nature preserve in 1970, it became the 24th nature preserve in the state of Illinois — a nature preserve system which now includes over 140 acres.

The geology of Franklin Creek is of considerable interest as the valley is deep enough to expose three distinct rock strata. New Richmond sandstone, a soft rock of Lower Ordovician age, is exposed at the bottom of the gorge. This is the oldest rock formation anywhere in the state, dating back to 500 million years ago. Above the New Richmond sandstone lies the Shakopee formation, consisting of sandy dolomite and also being of Lower Ordovician age. This strata is capped with St. Peter sandstone, which is of Middle Ordovician age, approximately 460 million years old. Away from the outcrops along the creek, which have been exposed by erosion, the bedrock is covered with a deep till from the

Wisconsin glaciation. Finally, this is mantled with a layer of loess from which the upland soil is developed.

The occurrence of vegetation is influenced by soil characteristics, topography, and moisture. Low lying areas along the creekbed support a bottomland forest dominated by silver maple and hackberry. Slippery elm and Kentucky coffee tree also occur here. Ravines support mesic (intermediate between wet and dry) upland forests characterized by sugar maple and basswood. Paw paw, an understory shrub of more southern distribution, is found here. On drier sites, a dry-mesic forest of white oak, red oak, black oak, shagbark hickory, and hop hornbeam is found.

A small glacial drift hill prairie remnant is present in the preserve. Indian grass and tall dropseed are characteristic plants of this habitat. Other prairie species present include false toadflax, flowering spurge, and hoary puccoon.

High quality, undisturbed cliff communities are present on the bedrock outcrops. Canada yew, an evergreen shrub of more northern woods, is common here. Bladdernut, bishop's-cap, and shooting star are also found here, as well as several species of ferns.

The forested areas provide habitat for many species of nongame wildlife. Woodpeckers, flycatchers, thrushes, vireos, and warblers are among the breeding birds on the site. The area provides critical stopover habitat for many more species during migration. Great blue herons and green herons have been observed here. Mammals utilizing the area include raccoons, chipmunks, gray and fox squirrels, beaver, and deer. Shrews, white-footed mice, weasels, and fox may also be seen. Nineteen species of fish have been recorded from Franklin Creek.

DEVELOPMENT

For years the Franklin Creek has been a favorite "back yard" recreation site. In 1970, Mrs. Winnifred Knox donated over 100 acres of land her pioneer ancestors had settled for park purposes. Through the 1970s, the Natural Land Institute purchased additional properties as they became available. Anxious citizens of Franklin Grove, wanting to see development of the Franklin Creek area, organized in 1981 to form the Franklin Creek Preservation Area Committee. Since the Committee's formation, they have gained the reputation of being the first vol-

unteer group in the state to develop a state park through volunteer efforts. The Committee secured donations of money and labor, along with assistance from the Franklin Center Future Farmers of America, to construct roads, shelters, picnic tables, restrooms, run underground electric lines, drill wells, and clear hiking trails. Dedication services were held Aug. 28, 1982 to officially open the park. In April of 1986, the Department of Conservation appointed the first ranger to manage the new park.

FACILITIES

Picnicking — Norwegian Hill and Mill Springs Day Use areas each have two shelters complete with electricity, cooking grills, picnic tables, restrooms, and drinking water. The facilities at the Mill Springs Day Use Area are totally handicapped accessible. A walk-in picnic area with parking by Sunday's Bridge offers four secluded picnic areas with picnic tables and cooking grills. The Sunday's Shelter and the Knox Shelter may be reserved by contacting the park ranger.

TRAILS

Hiking — Four and one-half miles of hiking trails are marked and maintained at the park. All trail markers are numbered and clearly shown on the park map to help you follow the trails. The Mill Springs Handicapped Trail is a unique, concrete-surfaced trail suitable for people of all mobility levels. The trail leads to the beautiful Mill Spring and is designed for all visitors as a self-guided nature trail, especially for the blind. The trail possesses an easy rating. All other trails possess a medium difficulty rating. Pioneer Pass is highly recommended to see some of the park's unique, natural beauty. The three creek crossings on Pioneer Pass are wet at this time pending the construction of footbridges.

Equestrian — The equestrian area contains six miles of trails. The Rock River trail and Horseman's Association have been very instrumental in developing and maintaining this area.

Snowmobiling — The six miles of equestrian trails serve as snowmobile trails in the winter after a four-inch base exists.

Cross-Country Skiing — Trails wind through 65 acres of rolling, wooded landscape. Trails are groomed on a weekly basis and possess a medium difficulty rating.

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FISHING

Fishing is allowed in the Franklin Creek on state-owned property. Use your park map to be sure you are on park property. Franklin Creek is not stocked at the present time but does support a population of smallmouth bass, channel catfish, carp, and red-horse.

Please — This park is for all to enjoy, so help keep it clean. Put all litter in the nearest trash container. No plants or parts of any tree may be removed or damaged. If you have a question or need help, contact the park ranger.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

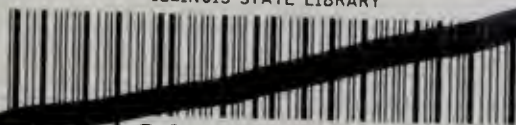
Groups of 25 or more persons will not be admitted to any state site unless permission from the site superintendent has been obtained to use the facilities. In addition, groups of minors must have adequate supervision and at least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous state sites are within easy access of every part of Illinois. Lodges, cabins, and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette, and Giant City; White Pines Forest and Cave-In-Rock have cabins and dining rooms only. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge managers.

Most state sites are open year-round except on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to facilities is by foot only.

For more information about this site, contact Park Ranger, 1872 Twist Road, Franklin Grove, IL 61031, phone (815) 456-2878. For information on other Illinois sites, write the Department of Conservation, Division of Land Management, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, IL 62706.

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Legend:

- 0-1 Mill Springs Handicapped Trail
- 1-26 Pioneer Pass
- 27-34 Norwegian Hill Trail
- 35-40 Black Bass Trail
- 41-48 Quarry Trail
- Nature Preserve Boundaries

Distances:

- 3 Mi.
- 1.85 Mi.
- 1 Mi.
- 1 Mi.
- 1 Mi.

Map Labels:

- Twist Road
- Cross-Country Ski Area/ Equestrian Area
- Equestrian Area/ Snowmobile Trails
- Monday's Bridge
- Park Headquarters
- Private Property
- Mill Springs Day Use Area
- Sunday's Bridge
- Sunday's Shelter
- Walk-in Picnic Area
- Kiwanis Shelter
- Old Mill Road
- Franklin Creek
- Franklin Grove
- Entrance Road
- Daysville Road
- Old Mill Road
- Franklin Grove
- Dixon
- Route 38
- Black Bass Pond
- Staircase
- Beecher Brown's Spring
- Knox Shelter
- Norwegian Hill Day Use Area
- Banker Shelter
- Quarry
- Whipple's Cabin
- Dyars's Pond
- Singer's Pond
- Mill Spring
- Twist Road
- Winds Route 38
- Natural Land Institute Property
- (Recent Additions to Nature Preserve)

Inset Map:

- WHITUPINES FOREST STATE PARK
- CASTLE ROCK STATE PARK
- LONGEN MEMORIAL STATE PARK
- FRANKLIN CREEK STATE NATURAL AREA
- FRANKLIN GROVE
- PRESENT REAGAN BROWNS SPRING
- Rochelle
- Dixon

North Arrow: N

Park Map